

**VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**Thursday, July 20, 2006**  
**County Council Room and Kona Mayor's Office (Via Videoconferencing)**  
**3:00 p.m.**

**Present**

**Members**

Don D. Bennett  
Penny Fox  
Richard Highley  
Roy Hinokawa  
Louis Kaoiwi  
Wendall Kekumu  
George Mukai  
Hideo Segawa  
George Yamamoto

**Kona Mayor's Office (Via Videoconferencing)**

**Members**

Richard Stevens  
Antonio Gaspar

**Guests (Kona)**

Minoru Hanato  
Herb Lum  
Lee Pretsch  
Joe Pretsch

**Guests (Hilo)**

Mary Yoshida

**Ex-Officio (Hilo)**

Patricia Engelhard, Director, P&R  
Keith Ribbentrop, OVS

**Also Present (Hilo)**

Nathalie Santos, Secretary  
Herring Kalua, Representative, State Veterans Advisory Board  
Diane Noda, Deputy Corporation Counsel

**Absent**

Denny Austen  
Morris Kihara  
Patrick Pavao  
Gilbert Sampaia

**CALL TO ORDER**

- Chairman Richard Highley called the meeting to order at 3:05 pm.
- The newest member Antonio Gaspar, representing American Legion Kona Post 20 was sworn in by Deputy Managing Director Barbara Kossow prior to the meeting.

## **STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

### **Veterans Cemetery II**

#### **Concerns Relating to Rules - Items Left on Gravesites**

##### **Presentation by Mary Yoshida**

Guest Mary Yoshida said that her husband was reinterred at Veterans Cemetery II and shared some of her concerns about the care of that cemetery. She observed both Cemetery I and II and is very familiar with veterans cemeteries since her husband retired after 24 years of military service. One of her concerns relates to the white picket fences erected on some of the graves. She stumbled over one while on her way to her husband's grave and informed P&R immediately about the dangers, since then all of the picket fences have been removed. Other concerns include seeing articles of clothing, artificial flowers, Christmas decorations, stuffed animals, plants with concrete around it, pebbles, etc.. She understands it's allowed during a period of mourning, but after awhile they should be removed.

Mary also contacted Keith Ribbentrop of OVS and Ed Cruickshank of Department of Defense on Oahu, who suggested she take photos, which were shared with members. The icing on the cake was at one gravesite where a chainlink fence was put up and the grave stone hoisted up to be read like a magazine, the relatives of the grave next to it did the same thing. If someone does something, others follow. She shared that the cemetery should be one of respect. She said on behalf of the Department of Parks and Recreation, employees spend too much time having to pick up items from each grave. A couple days ago she watched one employee spend 15 minutes just picking up plants from **one grave** which takes away from the rest and these items are illegally there anyway.

Mary Yoshida stated that it's very important for the Veterans and they deserve to have a very respectful and dignified cemetery. She thanked members for listening to her and offered help if needed.

Chairman Highley thanked Mary Yoshida for sharing her concerns and said he would bring subject up under New Business for comments.

## **PREVIOUS MEETINGS MINUTES – JUNE 15, 2006**

- The minutes of the June 15, 2006 meeting were approved as submitted

## **REPORT ON CEMETERIES – STATE VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD**

### **Hawaii Island Representative Mr. Herring Kalua**

#### **Veterans Cemetery III - West Hawaii**

Mr. Herring Kalua reported that the bid was put out for the graveliners, however, no bids were received. Because there were no bids, there are no graveliners, the funds were put back into the budget to be used towards design portion of the cemetery. Director Engelhard said she has concerns, but will express that later.

Representative Cindy Evans has concerns about the maintenance budget for Veterans Cemeteries, would like to have a West Hawaii Advisor on the State Veterans Advisory Board (same position as Herring Kalua), and the \$300,000 funds for the Cemetery. Mr. Kalua referred Representative Evans to Ed Cruickshank of the Department of Defense and P&R Director Pat Engelhard.

### **Veterans Cemeteries I and II - Columbariums**

Mr. Kalua asked the State Veterans Advisory Board if the same type of temporary columbariums as West Hawaii - Veterans III could be installed at Veterans Cemetery II. The response is that it cannot be done, we need to solve the problems of those available niches and fill those before requesting new columbariums.

Mr. Kalua volunteered to work with P&R to find the doors and solve problems regarding niches including the concern about 1 door for 4 niches. He was told that is how it is at the Veterans Cemetery in Kaneohe and they have a wooden door or box for each niche for privacy. He requested more information and photos on that.

Louis Kaouiwi requested that Mr. Kalua go back to Ed Cruickshank and share those concerns again because the columbariums at the National Cemetery are individually covered. Funds were previously requested from the State to redo those columbariums because the County does not have funds. They were told to go see Veterans Administration. He shared that it seems like we're going in a merrie go round, passing the buck back and forth. If the VA is not going to do it, we need to request funding from the legislature so problems with columbarium can be corrected. The veterans are afraid to use it because if someone breaks the marble, removes and scatters the ashes, P&R will be liable.

Mr. Kalua responded that he agrees with Louis 100%, but all of the people that were involved at that time, are no longer here or are not aware of problems. He is just informing committee of the response to his request from a previous meeting which was to request one temporary columbarium like the one in Kona to start off for placement at Veterans Cemetery II. The response is that we need to solve problems with the columbariums that are currently located at both Veterans I and II. We need to work with our legislators to obtain funding, Representative Evans is aware and has concerns relating to Veterans Cemeteries.

Mr. Kalua informed Representative Evans of the following relating to veterans: On the east side the concerns relate to the columbariums and finishing up of expansion project at Cemetery II. On the west side recommendation is for the State to communicate with the Veterans groups in Kona and the Department of Parks and Recreation regarding plans. The biggest concern is the issue of running out of space before Phase II is complete in West Hawaii. Something needs to be done right away since no one bid for the graveliners.

Chairman Highley said we need to know when the meeting will take place between the Veterans of West Hawaii and the State. He also asked Mr. Kalua if anyone from Washington attends the State Veterans Advisory Meetings and the response was no.

Chairman Highley feels that when Washington is aware of the problems, things get resolved quicker and also asked Mr. Kalua if he is the only person that attends state meetings from the Big Island. Mr. Kalua said there are representatives from each island and he is the only representative for the Big Island.

Louis Kawaii recommended Mr. Kalua coordinate requests for funding with Senator Sakamoto of Military Affairs Committee at the State Legislature.

Mr. Minoru Hanato asked if the plans are that there will be no graveliners at all. Chairman Highley responded that at this time there were no bids submitted for graveliners so funds will be put back into the state budget.

Mr. Kalua said he will talk to Senator Sakamoto and will also try to get Ed Cruickshank to talk to P&R Director Engelhard and the West Hawaii Veterans. He will work hard to get these problems solved for the veterans.

Chairman Highley shared that he sent an email to Mr. Morita of DAGS requesting another meeting regarding Veterans Cemetery III-West Hawaii and has not yet received a response. He asked Mr. Kalua to please ask the State to communicate with us. Louis Kawaii said he heard that Mr. Morita is no longer with DAGS, and that Major Mitsuyoshi is again the contact.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### **VETERANS CEMETERY II – EXPANSION PROJECT**

Director Engelhard reported that Veterans II currently has a lot of bald spots. The contractor is working on removing the hilahila grass. The current estimate for completion is now October.

### **VETERANS CEMETERY III – WEST HAWAII**

#### **(Reforestation Project)**

Chairman Highley reported the fence is going up, a meeting was held with Harold Deniz and fencing should be completed by next month's meeting. Next volunteers will move on to the gates that are needed. Irrigation has been installed and trees planted. Continues to receive help from the community and Pohakuloa Training Military Personnel.

### **VETERANS CEMETERY III - WEST HAWAII**

#### **(Flower Vases - In Ground)**

Chairman Highley reported that they received enough in-ground flower vases for every grave. Vases were purchased with a grant by the West Hawaii Non-Profit Organization. The grass is getting so thick it needs to be thinned, cut, mowed and leveled with sand in order to install in-ground. Chairman Highley contacted Less Chess of the Golf Course Association to help again with this process. Mr. Chess requested that a representative from the veterans group attend the next meeting to make this request. They will be more than willing to assist with thinning and top coating within the next couple months.

Chairman Highley said they are hoping that the grass will be green and ready by Veterans Day. After its leveled, ground will be ready for installing vases.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Veterans Cemetery I and II**

#### **Concerns of Mary Yoshida - Rules of the Cemetery**

##### **Items on Plots & Artificial Flowers**

P&R Director Engelhard responded to Mrs. Yoshida's concerns about the things erected and left by families at various plots by stating that we receive complaints no matter which way we go, P&R staff tries to be sensitive by allowing the families that are grieving to have some time and then stop it.

Penny Fox asked if the rules are posted at the cemetery and Director Engelhard responded that they are. The rules are also distributed to families by the mortuaries at the time of burials.

#### **County Building - Renovation - Relocation of Hilo Meetings**

Director Engelhard announced that the County Building would be closing for approximately 2 1/2 years during renovations. The Hilo Veterans Advisory Committee meetings will need to relocate sometime between August and October to the new Councilroom, probably at the Ben Franklin Building. Members will be informed when that happens.

Chairman Highley suggested holding one of these monthly meetings in West Hawaii.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Chairman Highley said that Mr. Lee will be replacing Mr. Segawa and Mr. Robert Welter will fill the Korean War Veterans slot. There is still one vacancy for an independent slot.

#### **Sound System - Councilroom And Kona Mayor's Office**

Chairman Highley apologized for the problems with the sound system and difficulty in hearing attendees from Kona during this meeting.

## **EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS**

### **Veterans Cemeteries I and II - Annual Community Project**

#### **Korean War Veterans - Cleaned Headstones at both Cemeteries**

Keith Ribbentrop reported that the Korean War Veterans recently cleaned all of the headstones at Veterans Cemeteries I and II. They did an excellent job and do it annually.

### **Veterans Administration - No Itinerant Visits Until October**

Veterans Administration has stopped its itinerant visits to neighbor islands until October of this year due to a lack of funds. (No Veterans Service Representatives will be at Vets Centers in either Hilo or Kona until October 2006.)

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **VETERANS CEMETERY III - WEST HAWAII**

#### **Columbarium - Installed Brackets for Vases**

Mr. Minoru Hanato announced that on the columbarium with niches that have urns in them, he mounted flower vases & brackets. On the rest he installed brackets and put the cups on the inside of the niche.

Director Engelhard thanked Minoru Hanato for volunteering his time to take on that project.

#### **Gate Closure**

Vice Chairman Stevens asked the status of later gate closure times for the West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery.

Director Engelhard said she wasn't sure, but thinks she spoke to Glenn Taguchi about it and has no answer.

Chairman Highley will follow up with Glenn Taguchi of State Parks.

### **New Park Caretaker at Veterans Cemetery III**

Director Engelhard said that Kimo Auhoon will be leaving the cemetery, a new park caretaker will be assigned.

### **VETERANS CEMETERY I**

George Mukai announced that the last 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion Memorial Service will be held on September 24<sup>th</sup> at Veterans Cemetery I beginning at 10 am. It will be the last service because there are only (3) active members left.

## **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, August 17, 2006, at 3:00 p.m. in the Hawai'i County Councilroom and video-conferencing at the Kona Mayor's Office.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 3:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathalie Santos  
Secretary